



Qur'ānic Orthography: The Written Representation Of The Recited Text Of The Qur'ān

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"Quick! Help the Muslims before they differ about the text of the Qur'ān as the Christians and Jews differed about their scriptures".

Thus demanded Hudhayfa bin al-Yamān of `Uthmān, the third Caliph, on returning from battles in Azerbaijan (25/645). Hudhayfa had become perturbed when he saw Muslim soldiers from different parts of Syria and Iraq meeting together and differing in their readings of the Qur'ān^[1], each considering his reading to be the correct one. Up to then the only full official written copy which was made under Abū Bakr (d.13/634) had remained unpublished, kept first with Abū Bakr, then with `Umar, and after his death with his daughter Hafsa, a widow of the Prophet^[2]. Responding to the urgent demand for help, `Uthmān sent word to Hafsa, asking for the copy in her possession to be sent to him so that a number of copies could be made of it, to be publicised and followed as the only authorised Qur'ān in the different parts of the Muslim world. This prevented the possibility of different versions evolving in time, as Hudhayfa had feared, when he urged `Uthmān to guard against it.

In the `Uthmānic copies, the Qur'ān was written in a particular *rasm* (orthography) which became known as *al-rasm al-`Uthmānī* (the `Uthmānic way of writing the text of the Qur'ān) also referred to as *rasm al-mushaf*. As the copies made at his orders and distributed to various parts of the Muslim world were meant to be authoritative, it is no wonder that their *rasm* assumed authority as the correct way of writing the Qur'ān. Arabic orthography at the time was not yet developed in the way we have known for centuries, particularly in two important areas. There was no distinction between letters of the alphabet of similar shape and there were no vowel marks. This may now give the impression that such a system must have given rise to great confusion in reading. This was not actually the case because the morphological patterns of words in Arabic enable readers to read even very unfamiliar material without the short vowels being marked. More important, however, as far as the Qur'ān was concerned, was the fact that learning and reading relied above all on oral transmission. In the Islamic tradition, writing remained a secondary aid; nevertheless, to ensure

correct reading of the written texts of the Qur'ān, particularly for those coming after the first generation of Muslims, steps were taken gradually to improve the orthography. This started with the two above mentioned areas by introducing dots to indicate different vowels and nūnātion and these were put in different coloured ink from that of the text. There were also dots to distinguish between consonants of similar shape. This work was carried out chiefly by three men: Abū-l-Aswad al-Du'alī (d. 69 / 688), Naṣr Ibn `Aṣim (d. 89 / 707) and Yaḥyā Ibn Ya`mur (d.129 /746). Understandably there was some opposition at first to adding anything to the way the Qur'ān was written. Ibn `Umar (73/692) disliked the dotting; others welcomed it, clearly because it was, in fact, doing no more than ensuring proper reading of the Qur'ān as received from the Prophet, and this view was accepted by the majority of Muslims throughout the different parts of the Muslims world, from the time of the tābi`ūn. The people of Madinah were reported to have used red dots for vowels - *tanwīn*, *tashdīd*, *takhfīf*, *sukūn*, *waṣl* and *madd* and yellow dots for the *hamzas* in particular. Naṣr^[3] (placing dots on words in the *mushaf*), became a separate subject of study with many books written on it.^[4]

Al-Khalīl Ibn Aḥmad (d.170/786) introduced the traditional vowel signs into Arabic orthography instead of the dots, but the dotting system continued in writing Qur'ānic material. Eventually the traditional vowel signs were adopted for the Qur'ān.^[5]

It was thus in order to serve the Qur'ān that Arabic orthography was developed. After all, the Qur'ān, as collected under Abū Bakr, became the first book in the Arabic language. It was in order to serve the Qur'ān that more and more people began to learn reading and writing; that the art of calligraphy was developed, which became one of the chief arts of Islam. The Qur'ān, which unified the Arabic literary language and spread it into areas far beyond Arabia, was in fact the starting point of all Islamic and Arabic subjects of study^[6], One of these subjects in particular has important bearing on Qur'ānic orthography: that is, Arabic phonetics, which was developed in *`ilm tajwīd al-Qur'ān*, the science of the proper articulation and reading of the Qur'ān. Among other things, this has minutely described and definitively prescribed for posterity the articulation of consonants and vowels singly and consecutively: the way of reciting the Qur'ān as received from the Prophet. This requires a degree of exactitude unmatched in reading any other material in Arabic. Qur'ānic orthographic signs had to be used with the Qur'ānic *rasm* and developed to a higher standard of representation than is known or needed in ordinary Arabic orthography.

Alongside the development of studies in Arabic grammar, Arabic orthography also developed for linguistic and literary material, and although the `Uthmānic *rasm* was one of the sources of ordinary orthography^[7] the latter began to differ from the `Uthmānic *rasm* of the Qur'ān. The question was asked whether it was admissible to write the Qur'ān itself in the new orthography. Mālik (179/795) was asked and said: No, the Qur'ān should be written only in the way of the first writing. He was also asked whether the additional *wāw* and *alif* (as in the word **اولوا**) should be deleted since they were not pronounced and said no. Similarly Ibn Ḥanbal (244/858) said it was unlawful to deviate in writing the *mushaf* in *wāw*, *yā*, *alif* or any other way.^[8] In line with such views, it will be seen that

adherence to the Qur'ānic *rasm* has persisted up to the present.

Along with numerous other aspects of the Qur'ān, its orthography was singled out as a separate branch of study known as *`ilm al-rasm*.^[9] Abū `Amr Al-Dānī (444/1052) examined in detail the characteristics of this *rasm*. His book *al-Muqni`*^[10] remained an important authority - Suyūṭī (909/1503) reduced the rules of Qur'ānic *rasm* to 6 as follows:*

1. The rule of deletion, *ḥadhf*
2. The rule of addition, *ziyādah*
3. The rule of substitution, *badal*
4. The rule of the *hamza*,
5. The rule of joining and separating, *al-waṣl wa-l-faṣl*
6. The rule of cases where there are two canonical readings but the text is written according to one of them, *ma fīhi qirā'atan fa-kutiba `alā iḥdāhumā*.

I. Deletion (*ḥadhf*)

This involves deletion of an *alif* or *yā'* or *wāw* or *lām*.

Alif

is deleted after vocative *yā'* as in *يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ*

after *na* of the plural as in *أَنْجَيْنَكُمْ*

in demonstrative pronouns as in *هَؤُلَاءِ ، هَذِهِ هَٰذَا* etc.

in names of God as *الرَّحْمَنُ ، اللَّهُ*

after *lām* as *خَلْفَ*

between two *lāms* as in *كَلَّلَهُ*

in proper names of more than three letters - *إِسْمَاعِيلُ ، إِبْرَاهِيمُ*

in dual of a noun or verb if it is not at the end of the letter, as in *يَعْلَمَنَّ ، رَجُلَانِ*

in sound masculine and feminine plural as *الصَّالِحِينَ وَالصَّالِحَاتِ*

unless it is followed by *hamza* as in *وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ*

or *shadda* as in الضَّالِّينَ

in plurals on the pattern, مَسْجِدٍ as in مَسَاجِدَ

or a similar pattern as in مَسْكِينٍ ، نَصْرِي

in adjectives like عَلِيمٍ

in the number ثَلَاثٍ

in nouns with two or more *alifs* as in آخِرٍ ، أَدَمَ

in بِسْمِ اللَّهِ and in the imperative of سَأَلَ as in وَسْئَلْ

It should be noted here that normal orthography has retained the Qur'ānic *rasm* in many of these cases as in the demonstratives, and that Qur'ānic *rasm*, in some cases, caters for more than one *qirā'a* as in خَلْفَ which could be read as khilāfa or khalfa.

yā'

yā' is deleted if it is a first person pronoun at the end of a vocative noun as in يَا قَوْمِي instead of يَتَقَوْمِ

at the end of a word as a preceding kasra is deemed a sufficient indication of it, as in فَاَرْهَبُونِي ، وَلِي دِينِي إِذَا يَسُرِّي instead of فَاَرْهَبُونِ ، وَلِي دِينِ

where it is following another yā' in the same word as , الْحَوَارِيِّنَ ، النَّبِيِّينَ instead of الْحَوَارِيْنَ ، النَّبِيِّينَ

in Sura 2 where it is written اِبْرَاهِمَ which suggests a special reading; at the end of every noun with a weak third radical in the nominative or genitive case as in غَيْرِ بَاغٍ وَلَا عَادٍ and this is also deleted in normal orthography.

wāw

is deleted when preceded by another wāw (to avoid repetition) as in فَاَوْا instead of فَاَوُوا and دَاوُدَ instead of دَاوُودَ

In the last example it is also deleted in ordinary vocabulary;

wāw is also deleted as the chair of the *hamza* with words of **رؤيا** and **ايوا** as in **تؤويه** instead of **الرؤيا** and **تؤويه** instead of **الرؤيا**

It is deleted as the third radical in certain verbs (four) in the indicative mood as in **سندعوا** , **يدعو** instead of **سندع الزبانيه** instead of **يدع الانسان سندع الزبانيه**

lām

is deleted when preceded by another *lām* in **اليل** , **الانى** , **التى** instead of **الليل** , **الانى** , **اللى**

nūn

is deleted when repeated in **تأمننا** instead of **تأمننا** and **ننجد** instead of **ننجد**

Avoiding repetition of the same shape is clearly an important factor in the rule of deletion.

II. Addition (ziyādah)

This applies to three letters, *alif*, *wāw* and *yā'* where the letter is written but not pronounced.

Alif

is added at the end of a word after the *wāw* of the plural as in **قالوا ضربوا**

This is also added in normal orthography to distinguish the plural from the singular;

after the *wāw* in **الربوا** instead of **الربا** ;

after a final *hamza* written as a *wāw* as in **يبدؤا** , **تفتؤا**

Some Kufan scholars used to add this in normal orthography^[11].

in **ماتين** , **ماتنة**

in **لشئ** instead of **لشئ** (18: 23)

in **لأذبحته** , **لأؤضعوا** (27:21) instead of **لأذبحته** (9:47) **لأؤضعوا**

between the *jīm* and *yā'* in جَائ in (39:69; 89:23) instead of جي
 in the word نبأ instead of نأ , in تاتيسوا (12:87), يائيس (13:31) instead of
 يياس , تياسوا

It should be noted that apart from the first 3 words here, in the examples given for the addition of *alif*, a *hamza* is adjacent to the *alif* which suggests that the addition has to do with the pronunciation of *hamza*. Al-Dānī suggests that *alif* is added to *hamza* to strengthen it^[12].

wāw

is added after the *hamza* as in سؤريكم ; (7:145) instead of ساريكم in
 اولئك , اولات , اولوا

This is also added in normal orthography. Again, a *hamza* and *damma* are adjacent. A variant pronunciation and a desire to avoid confusion of some words of similar shapes account for the addition^[13].

yā'

This is added in nine places^[14] in the Qur'ān, as in أفان مات , من نبأ instead
 of أفان , نأ and again in all the nine places it is adjacent to a *hamza* which
 suggests that the *hamza*, and the various ways it is pronounced in Arabic,
 accounts for the addition.

It has been observed that *alif*, *wāw* and *yā'* are involved in the rules of addition and deletion and will also be involved with the rule of *hamza*. This should not be surprising in view of the fact that in grammar the way they behave is responsible for such classes of verb as the hollow, the weak *lām* and the hamzated.

III. The Hamza

Hamza is peculiar in Arabic in many respects. A glottal stop as it is, it is deemed more difficult to pronounce than other consonants. Accordingly it takes one of four forms: distinctly pronounced, *tahqīq*;^[15] lightened, *talyīn*; changed, *ibdāl*; or deleted altogether, *ḥadhf*. These different ways are observed in *qirā'āt* and the various Arab dialects. Hamzated verbs are also treated in a separate section in grammar. It is no wonder that it affects the pronunciation and orthography of adjacent letters in the various sections dealt with so far. In the writing of the *hamza* itself, Qur'ānic and normal orthographies are similar in many ways. In some aspects, however, Qur'ānic *rasm* differs as in the following cases:

- A medial *hamza* preceded by a *sukūn* is written without a chair يسل برنا , سوة instead of

بريتا ، سواة ، يسأل in normal orthography.

It should also be noted that a middle *hamza* with *kasra* is written *under* a chair of *yā'* as in السراير instead of السرائر.

- A *hamza* is not written with an *alif* if preceded or followed by *alif* as in امنوا ، شنان instead of امنوا ، شنان . Avoiding repetition of shape is the factor involved here; in normal orthography this is achieved by writing a *madda*, i.e. (~), but the *madda* sign is reserved in Qur'anic orthography for further extending a long vowel as will be seen later.
- It is not written a *yā'* when preceded or followed by *yā'* as in متكنين ، خسين instead of متكنين ، خاسين ; nor is it written as a *wāw* when preceded or followed by a *wāw* as in يؤوده ، يؤوسا instead of يؤوده ، يؤوسا . Again, avoiding repetition of shape is involved here and in general appears to carry more weight in Qur'anic than in ordinary orthography.^[16]

IV. Changing

This affects changing *alif* into *wāw* or *yā'* ; changing *nūn* into *alif*, and changing the final feminine *ha* (*tā' marbūta*) into an ordinary open *tā'*:

In this connection it should be remembered that changing is an important feature of Arabic morphology dealt with under the title *al-'i`lal wa-l-'ibdāl*).

alif:

the *alif* is written *wāw* for velarisation (*tafkhīm*) in some *qirā'āt* in صلاة ربا ، حياة (without *idafa*) instead of زكاة ، حياة and مناة ، نجاة مشكاة ، غداة instead of مناة ، نجوة ، مشكوة ، غدوة

It is written *yā'* if it has been changed from an original *yā'* as in يتوفكم instead of يتوفاكم .

The energetic lighter *nūn* of *tawkid* is written *alif* in لنسعا (47:8) and فتعسا (12: 13) ليكونا (96:15). The *nun* of إذن is written *alif* and pronounced *alif* in pausing. إذا as in 17:73.

This is in line with Baṣran grammarians; the Kufans write it as *nūn*.^[17]

The feminine *ha'* at the end of a noun is written *tā' marbūta* except for the following words: رحمت instead of رحمة ; نعمت instead of نعمة ; سنت instead of سنة ; امرأت instead of امرأة ; كلمت instead of كلمة (in four cases it is actually the *tā* the plural in some

V. Joining And Separating

VI. Variant Canonical Readings

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al-ghurufāti; فكهين (52:19) is *fakahīn* or *fākihīn*.^[22]

In some other cases the variant readings could not be contained in a single shape of a word and accordingly different forms were distributed in the `Uthmānic copies. Thus, وَصَّى (2:132) is written *wassa* according to Ḥafṣ reading and *awasa* according to Warsh; وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْعَزِيزِ وَأَوْسَى (26:217) *wa-tawakkal* was written فَتَوَكَّلْ *fa-tawakkal* in the copies sent to Madina and Syria.^[23]

These are the six rules of Qur'ānic *rasm*. Rule VI of Variant Readings is exclusive to Qur'ān in Arabic because of the canonical *qirā'āt* which were accommodated in the *rasm*. The five other rules of addition, deletion, *hamza*, change and joining and separating are not in fact exclusive to the writing of the Qur'ān; they constitute normal chapters of books on *imla'* in Arabic.^[24] The difference lies in the fact that the features are much more limited in ordinary orthography: the Qur'ānic *rasm*, as we said, was one of the sources for ordinary orthography.

In addition to the abovementioned traditional six rules of *rasm* I would add one more feature which has for long become a rule of writing the Qur'ān, that is:

VII. Full Vocalisation

This is done to an extent unknown in the writing of any other material in Arabic. As al-Dānī stated: Every letter should be given its due signs of vowel, *sukūn*, *shadda* and other signs.^[25] This becomes immediately obvious to anyone who opens the pages of the *mushāf* and will be treated later under *istilahāt al-dabt* (conventional signs determining the proper pronunciation of Qur'ānic material).

The Qur'ān is unique in Arabic and is treated as such in various respects. It is prescribed for anyone, when touching the text of the Qur'ān, to be in a state of ritual ablution. The way of reciting the Qur'ān is different from reciting any other text, including that age-old and most cherished art of the Arabs - poetry. When the Qur'ān is read, Muslims are enjoined to listen to it and keep silent so that they may obtain mercy (7:204). The Qur'ān is also written in a unique, fully-vowelled, calligraphic *naskh*, different from writing even *ḥadīth* material. Each chapter begins from the first verse and the material follows to the last without any paragraphing or blank spaces to exclude the possibility of adding any non-Qur'ānic material. The traditional division into thirty parts (for the benefit of those who wish to follow the tradition of reciting the entire text within a month) half, quarters and eighths of each are marked without interrupting the flow of the material.^[26]

* * *

A Fine Example

The application of the above rules of *rasm*, is best exemplified in an edition of the Qur'ān which maintains the tradition more than any other and now has more widespread circulation than any other

edition. This is the Egyptian edition, printed originally in 1337/ 1918. Far more than any other editions, it has been adopted in the most important centres of publishing the Qur'ān in the Middle East: Egypt, Saudi Arabia (especially the King Fahd Complex for printing the Qur'ān in Madina^[27]), Beirut and Turkey. This particular edition is, moreover, the one normally used as a base for translation of the Qur'ān into English^[28] and is the one whose orthography I will discuss below.

Unlike other editions, the Egyptian states its credentials for the reproduction of the text of the Qur'ān. It was produced in 1337/1918 not by an individual, but by a committee of four, which appears more authoritative, headed, as it was, by the principal of the Egyptian Qur'ān reading Institution *Shaykh al-maqāri al-miṣriyya*. In 1342/ 1923 it was adopted by a committee set up by King Fu'ad I under the supervision of the Azhar authority, and was printed at the Official Būlāq Press. It became known as the *amīrī mushaf* and became the model to be followed in Egypt and outside. It contained an appendix, *ta`rif bi-hādha mushāf al-sharīf*, an explanatory statement on this noble *mushāf*, which falls in three sections ending with the names and positions of members of the committee who checked it (in later editions given as *lajnat murāja`at al-maṣāḥif* - the committee for checking copies of the Qur'ān) under the supervision of the Supreme Council of Islamic Research and Culture in Al-Azhar.

The first section of the Appendix cites in detail the authorities relied upon in the writing of the *mushaf*. It was written, we are told at the beginning, according to the reading of Hafṣ as taken from `Aṣim, as from Ibn Habīb, as from the Companions `Uthmān, `Alī, Zayd ibn Thābit and Ubayy as received from the Prophet.

The Spelling was reproduced in accordance with what *`ulama' al-rasm* (scholars of Qur'ānic orthography) determined to be the system used in the personal copy of `Uthmān and the copies he sent to different Muslim cities, all as reported by the eminent authorities - Abū `Amr Al-Dāni (444 / 1052) and Sulaymān ibn Najāḥ (496/1103), giving the traditional authorities for this.

The specific way of vocalisation - *tariqat al-dabt* in writing the *mushāf* was the same as specified by scholars of *dabt* citing the traditional authoritative texts.

Places to pause in reading the verses of the Qur'ān are an important aspect of recitation. Commenting on Q. 73:4 *ورتل القرآن ترتيلا* (And recite the Qur'ān in slow, measured tones) the Caliph `Alī is reported to have defined *tartīl* as proper pronunciation of letters and knowing the places of pausing.^[29]

Traditional authorities are given in the *ta`rif* for determining places to pause as well as for the conventional signs for the different types of pause. Related to this is a statement on places of ritual prostration *sajda* on reading certain verses of the Qur'ān. The system of numbering the verses in the Qur'ān is given as the Kufan system taken ultimately from `Alī ibn Abī Tālib, according to which the total number is 6236 verses, and traditional authorities are cited.

Determination of the beginning of each of the 30 sections *juz'* of the Qur'ān, their halves (*ahzāb*) and quarters (*arbā'*), is a traditional aspect of the writing of the Qur'ān which is observed in the edition. So is a statement at the head of each *sura* as to its title, whether it was wholly or partly revealed at Makkah or Madinah, and number of verses. Traditional authorities for this are given.

The second section of the Appendix is dedicated mainly to a detailed specification and explanation of the conventional signs of vocalisation to ensure proper articulation *istilahāt al-dabt*. This is in fact a most important aspect of Qur'ānic orthography. Here we see the basic *rasm* which was sufficient to those early Muslims who knew the Qur'ān by heart anyway, augmented to become a highly developed written system of representation, more exact than anything known in Arabic.

The section on *istilahāt al-dabt* in the Appendix includes 18 items, 14 of which are diacritical signs that affect the way words are pronounced.^[30] We have seen earlier that the rules of *rasm* included addition, deletion and substitution of letters for certain reasons; signs in the present section ensure, nonetheless, the correct pronunciation in those cases.

1. placing a small circle (°) above a weak letter - *harf illa* - indicates that such a letter is additional and should not be pronounced either in connection or pause position, e.g.

قالوا *qālū*; أولئك *ulā'ik*; نبأ المرسلين *naba'i-l-mursalīn*. It should be noted that in ordinary orthography, additional letters are retained with nothing to indicate that they should not be pronounced; thus here the Qur'ānic orthography is seen to be more consistent and more precise.

2. placing an oval sign (°) above an *alif* followed by a vowelised letter, indicates that it is additional in consecutive reading but should be pronounced in a pause. e.g.

أنا خير منه pronounced *ana* and *anā* respectively; لكننا هو الله pronounced *lākina* and *lakinnā*.

3-5. placing (ح) above any letter indicates that it is unvowelised and should be given a full, distinct pronunciation, e.g. من خير ; whereas writing the letter without the sign and placing a *shadda* on the following letter indicated that the two are fully assimilated e.g. يلهت ذلك *yalhadhdhalik*. i.e., *th* has become *dh*. On the other hand, if it is removed from the first letter and then the *shadda* is removed from the second, this indicates masking - *ikhfā'* - or nasalisation, of the first letter so that it is neither distinct nor fully assimilated into the second, e.g. من ثمرة *mih thamaratin* - or is partially assimilated into the second, e.g. من وال *mihwālin*.

6. placing a small *mīm* instead of the second vowel of *tanwīn* or instead of a *sukūn* above a *nūn* without a *shadda* on a following *ba'* indicates changing the *tanwīn* or *nūn*

Qur'ān and are not heard, to any similar extent, in recitation of Arabic poetry. The *nūn*, *tanwīn* and *mudūd*, together with the higher relative frequency of occurrence of the letters *alif*, *lām*, *mīm*, *wāw* and *yā'* in the Qur'ān^[31] all have a slowing effect on the reading, more likely to make the reader and listener absorb the material, and they contribute a high degree of sonority to the recitation of the Qur'ān.

12. placing a small circle under ر in بِسْمِ اللَّهِ مَجْرَاهَا indicates that the fatha should be inclined to a *kasra* and the *alif* to a *yā'*. Thus instead of *majraha* it becomes *majraiha* (as in 'rays' in English). This is known as *imāla* and normal Arabic orthography has no sign to represent it even though this sound is common in some Arab countries; Qur'ānic orthography is thus more developed in this respect.

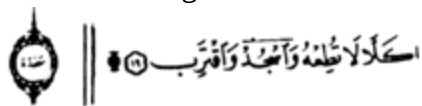
13. placing the same sign at the end of m in تَامَنَّا indicates *ishmām* - giving the consonant a trace of the pronunciation of *damma* according to Hafs *qirā'a*.

14. placing a dot above the second *alif* in أَعْجَمِي indicates that the second *hamza* should be pronounced lighter - *tashīl*. Thus instead of a '*a`jamiyyun*' it becomes almost like '*ā`jamiyyun*'. These last three features are important in some *qirā'āt* which explains an important function of Qur'ānic orthography.

15. The ornamental circle indicates the end of the verse which is different from a sentence in Arabic and affects the stress patterns in reading. Inside the circle is written the number of the verse always at the end (i.e., the full completion) and not at the beginning as in normal Arabic (and English) material.

16. * indicates the beginning of *rub` al-hizb* (an eighth of a *juz'*).

17-18. placing a line above a word indicates that a ritual prostration is required by the reader/listener on reaching the end of the verse which is further marked by an ornamental sign after the verse number and a further sign in the margin. e.g. 96:19



N.B. This edition uses one further sign, which is not listed here, that is, placing a س above the end of a word to indicate *saktah* (hiatus or slight interruption of reading), to separate two words, such as 'وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ عِوَجًا سَ قِيَمًا' and has not made in it [the Qur'ān] any crookedness straight, to give warning...' (18:1-2). Without the hiatus, the meaning would be distorted.

The third section of the Appendix deals with the various signs for pauses *`alāmāt al-waqf*. This is another area in which the writing of the Qur'ān is distinguished from the writing of any other Arabic

material. Modern punctuation marks became known in Arabic only last century, and up to now they are not universally adopted in a systematic way. In any case, none of these marks appear in the writing of the Qur'ān. Six pausal signs, *`alāmāt al-waqf* - are used in the *mushaf*, placed higher than all other signs as follows:

ـ

sign for a mandatory pause *al-waqf al-lāzim*. e.g.,

إِنَّمَا يَسْتَجِيبُ الَّذِينَ يَسْمَعُونَ - وَالْمَوْتَى

"... only those can accept 'who hear'. As for the dead, Allah will raise them up." (6:36).

The mandatory pause comes after who hear in Arabic. This is followed by *wa*, a conjunction which generally means and; it retains the same form even in contexts where it means as for. Without the mandatory stop, a reader may read the statement as: ... only those can accept who hear and the dead... which would corrupt the sense.

لا

sign for prohibited pause - *al-waqf al-mamnu`*. e.g.

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّيهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ ۚ يَقُولُونَ سَلَامٌ

"Those whose souls the angels take while they are goodly, to them they say: 'Peace be on you! Enter the Garden'" (16:32)

It is prohibited to pause at 'goodly' which would leave the sentence unfinished and impair the sense.

ج

sign of optional pause - *waqf jā'iz jawāzan mustawiya'-l-ṭarafayn*. e.g.

نَبَأُهُم بِالْحَقِّ إِنَّهُمْ فِتْنَةٌ

"We shall narrate to thee their story with truth. They were young men who believed in their Lord" (18: 131).

The optional pause comes after truth.

ﻭﺍﻟﻪ

sign of preferred non-pause *al-waqf jā'iz ma`a kawn al-wasl' awlā*.
e.g.,

إِلَّا هُوَ وَإِنْ يَمْسَسْكَ

"If Allah touches thee with affliction none can remove it but He;
and if He touches thee with Good, He is powerful over everything
(6:17).

This kind of pause comes after but He, but in order to give a fuller meaning it is preferable, in Arabic, to pause at the end of the verse.

ﻗﻠﯿﻞ

sign of preferred pause - *al-waqf jā'iz wa awlā*. e.g.

مَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ فَلَا تُمَارِ

"None knows them [the seven sleepers of the cave] save a few. So
contend not concerning them except ..." (18:22).

It is preferable to pause after a few.

**

Sign of selective pause - *ta`ānuq al-waqf*. If you pause at either of
the two places you may not pause at the other. e.g.,

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ * فِيهِ * هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ

can be read, pausing to make the meaning either as:

"This is the Book - no doubt. In it there is guidance for those who
..."

or

"This is the Book wherein is no doubt, a guidance to those who.."
(2:2)

If you pause at both places, the material following the first pause will read in it, which would disrupt the sense.

The underlying principle in all these is whether the sense has reached final completion or is not complete; has reached an acceptable stage of completion; or would be more fully expressed if carried into a further stage.

* * *

Tradition or Change

It was understandable that the `Uthmānic *rasm* should be given such a high status through the ages. Indeed some people took an extreme view that there were esoteric reasons for everything in it which could be grasped only by the very few endowed with esoteric knowledge. In the same way as there is *i'jāz* (inimitability) in the linguistic structure of the Qur'ān, they argued, there is also *i'jāz* in its *rasm*. Thus mystic explanations have been given, represented by such people as Abū-l-`Abbās al-Marākishī (721/1321)^[32]. It is clearly such views that led Ibn Khaldūn (808/1405) to castigate those holding them:

Do not pay attention to what some stupid people think that the companions of the Prophet were masters of the craft of writing and what we find in their writing different from systematic orthography is not actually as we imagine but there is an explanation and wisdom behind it. Thus they argue that the additional *alif* in لَا أَذِبحَهُ (27:21) is there to indicate that Solomon did not slaughter the hoopoe, and the additional *yā'* in بَابِند (51:47) indicates how complete divine power is in building the sky.

Such people were led to this view in Ibn Khaldūn's opinion by a desire to put the Companions above lack of knowledge in writing when in fact this was a craft, the knowledge of which is relative and not necessarily indicative of innate perfection or otherwise. The Arabs at the time of writing the *mushāf* were still closer to the Bedouin state which did not perfect crafts, and this, in Ibn Khaldūn's opinion, appeared in their writing of the *mushāf* which was written by a number of people whose knowledge of writing was not excellent and they followed various orthographies.^[33] It is understandable that Ibn Khaldūn should have been so incensed by the imaginary and far-fetched explanation of al-Marākishī; what he said about the early stage of writing may also have some justification but, on the other hand, he clearly did not pay regard to considerations of phonetics and *qirā'āt*, and how they affect various aspects of *rasm*. For instance in the very examples he quotes (and we have seen many other instances earlier), he overlooks the fact that additional letters come only after a *hamza*; the real explanation here has to be sought there, and in the desire of orthographers to ensure specific pronunciation as explained above, not for esoteric reasons as argued by al-Marākishī nor simply on the ground of inconsistency and lack of mastery of craftsmanship on

the part of early scribes, as argued by Ibn Khaldūn. His own views came to be dismissed out of hand by a modern authority on Qur'ānic *rasm* on the ground that he was a loner and not a mujtahid in the field. ^[34]

In the past and present ^[35] some people (the non-traditionalists) have argued that there is nothing sacred about that particular Qur'ānic *rasm*. There is nothing in the Qur'ān or ḥadīth to make it obligatory or recommended. The Muslims could use any specific system for writing the Qur'ān. The objective of writing the Qur'ān is surely to enable people to read it correctly and learn it correctly. Indeed, some argued that there was no reason that it should be written in an orthography that is not used for writing any other book of the time. ^[36] Desire to facilitate the reading and learning of the Qur'ān to each generation according to their contemporary orthography is an argument non-traditionalists have always repeated. They regard traditional orthography as inadequate in this respect, citing especially the seeming inconsistency in the way some words are written in the `Uthmānic *rasm*.

They were obviously unsuccessful, however, in citing such examples as **بَايِد** and **لَاَذْبَحْه** (always cited and highlighted in criticism of the *rasm*) linking they were two isolated examples of this feature. Critics do not seem to have noticed that such examples consistently have a *hamza* in them and no one asked whether this factor had any effect on the *rasm*. They were also unsuccessful in citing **بِسْمِ** written normally without an *alif*, but with an *alif* in Q. 56:74, 69:52, 96:1, because in these three instances it is **بِسْمِ رَبِّكَ** whereas in all others (115 places) it is **بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ** ; abbreviation (by omitting the *alif*) was clearly intended with the one most frequently used and with the name of Allah. Nor should critics have an argument in the numerous examples where various *qirā'āt* are involved or in examples where there is an intention of pointing out a contrast as explained earlier; this is a valid consideration in normal orthography. ^[37] However, they had a better argument in examples where there does not seem to be an obvious consideration of phonetics or *qirā'āt* for variations. For instance, **سَبْحَنَ** is written normally without an *alif* but in 17:93 it is written with an *alif* **سَبْحَانَ رَبِّي** ; similarly, **الَّيْلَ** is written with one *lām* but **اللَّهُو واللعب** with two.

In such examples the explanation might legitimately be sought, not in mystical considerations nor necessarily in simple inconsistency but in the fact that Arabic orthography even after the period of `Uthmān - as can be witnessed in older books on *imlā'* - knew more than one way of writing some letters within words. There were Kufan and Basran opinions and there was the question of jawāz - optional ways - in many cases. ^[38] Just as there were options in grammar, there were also options in orthography, but what was optional at an early stage of *rasm* became fixed because of the special status of things Qur'ānic.

Understandably the traditionalists have always had strong arguments for maintaining the status quo. After all the early *rasm* was set by the Companions of the Prophet and sanctioned by no less figures than Abū Bakr, `Umar, `Uthmān, `Alī and others, it was adopted by their followers in what amounts

to an *ijmā`*, so that Mālik, Aḥmad and other imams^[39] held that it should not be altered in any way. Great care were also taken to keep the Qur'ān as it originally was in pronunciation of the words and writing at that time. If the gate were to be opened, the traditionalists argue, to what was deemed desirable in *rasm* it might in time become open to pronunciation. Thus the juristic principle of *sadd al-dhara'i`* (blocking the way for unlawful or undesired things) was invoked. If changes in *rasm* are conceded, it is not unlikely that some might consider it desirable to write the Qur'ān in the Latin alphabet or write abridgements of it, or write it in Arab dialects which the non-traditionalists could argue would make it more accessible or such hocus-pocus and absurdities.^[40] Abandoning the *rasm* might also lead to abandoning many of *`ulūm al-adā'* (sciences of recitation). There are, moreover, many benefits in the `Uthmānic *rasm* which should not be sacrificed:

- (a) It indicates the origin of certain letters, as in **زكوة ، سلوة** written with *wāw*;
- (b) It indicates some *fusha* versions of Arabic such as that of Tayyi in writing the feminine *ha* as an ordinary open *ta'*; the deletion of the final *yā'* of the indicative verb in **يوم يأت** (11:105);
- (c) It indicates a different meaning of a word in a certain context: thus **أم من** is written as two words in (4:109) to indicate that **أم** here is in the sense **بل** of (rather) unlike in 67:22;
- (d) It indicates various *qirā'āt* of the same word - many examples can be cited here,^[41] to quote but two: **يخدعون** (2:4) is written without *alif* and there are two *qirā'as* of it - *yakhda`dna* and *yukhādī`ūna*; (6:115) is written with a *tā'* *marbūta* and there are two *qirā'as* of it - *kalimāt* and *kalimat*.

Traditionalist further argue that rules of ordinary orthography are themselves open to differences and changes and Qur'ānic *rasm* should not be made to follow them. Besides, it is not necessary in ordinary orthography that the writing of words should coincide with the pronunciation, thus we have words like **داود ، يرى ، اولئك هؤلاء ، لكن** to give but a few examples of 'irregular' writing, where the orthography does not reflect the pronunciation and this is perfectly accepted by the non-traditionalists. Nor is this peculiar to Arabic: it is far more extensive and accepted in English and French for instance. And, whereas the pronunciation of such irregular words is not indicated by any signs in modern Arabic, all cases of additions, deletions or substitution of letters in the Qur'ānic *rasm* are indicated by signs of *istilahāt al-dabt* to guide the reader to their correct pronunciation. It should also be remembered that the `Uthmānic *rasm* was one source of ordinary orthography^[42] and came to differ from it only in certain aspects, all of which have been identified in detail, including every single exception from the rules, in a way not surprising from scholars of the Qur'ān who counted even the occurrence of every single letter of the alphabet in the entire text.^[43] They also supplied signs to guide the reader to pronounce every word, making the *rasm* a uniquely precise

system of representation. This has always been supported by a tradition and an educational system, that considers reception by word of mouth is - as it was at the time of the Prophet - the primary way of teaching and learning the Qur'ān. In any case, in addition to *is̥tilahāt al-ḍabt* and the guide printed in the Appendix of the *mushaf*, some *mushafs* are now printed with a further guide at the foot margin of every page containing the Qur'ānic and the modern orthographic ways of writing words where the two systems differ; but Muslims have evidently insisted that the text of the Qur'ān itself should remain written in the `Uthmānic *rasm*. They apparently consider that this *rasm* has been an important way of ensuring that successive generations of Muslims have been faithful to the original writing and reading of the Qur'ān, ever since Ḥudhayfa Ibn al-Yamān urged `Uthmān: Quick! Help the Muslims before they differ about the text of the Qur'ān as the Christians and Jews differed about their scriptures.

Footnotes

[1] Bukhārī: *Sahīh*, fada'il al-Qur'ān, 3.

[2] Al-Dānī, Abū `Amr, *Al-Muqni` fīmarsūm wa-maṣāḥif ahl al-amṣār ma` kitāb al-Naqt*, Damascus, 1983, pp. 124-5.

[3] Al-Dānī, *op. cit.*, p. 125-6.

[4] Such as those by Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī (248/826) and Al-Dānī (444/1502).

[5] Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, I, Beirut, 199?, p. 484.

[6] Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, II, p. 348-56.

[7] Wālī, H., *Kitāb al-Imlā'*, Beirut, 1985, p. 41.

[8] Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, II, Beirut, 1987, p. 470.

[9] *ibid.*, p. 169.

[10] Dār al-Fikr, Damascus, 1983.

[11] Wālī, H., *ibid*, p. 101.

* Irqam, 11, pp. 471-82.

[12] *op. cit.*, p. 140.

[13] *ibid.*, p. 108-9.

[14] Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, n p. 475.

[15] Wālī, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

[16] But it does sometimes carry weight in normal orthography. See Wālī, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

[17] Wālī, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

[18] Al-Dānī, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[19] For details see Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, II, p. 477.

[20] Note that in modern Arabic *tā' marbūtā* is pronounced and written an ordinary *ta'* in names like: **رَأْفَت** ، **مَدَحَت** ، **حَيَاة** ; in languages like Turkish and Urdu, they say *salat* and *zakat*.

[21] Wālī, *op. cit.*, p. 143-151.

[22] For further examples see al-Dānī, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-92.

[23] See al-Dānī, *op. cit.*, p. 106 and Suyūṭī, II, p. 497.

[24] See H. Wālī, *op. cit.*, p. 173-5.

[25] *op. cit.*, p. 130.

[26] In some earlier and current editions, a mark is added, showing the end of ten verses to be read in prayers.

[27] See Appendix pp. p-ع of copies printed - 1405/1984. The *mushaf* printed in the King Fahd Complex is called *Mushaf al-Madīna al-nabawiyya*.

[28] Arberry's translation is an exception.

[29] H. S. `Uthmān, *Haqq al-Tilāwa*, Jordan, 1901/1971, p. 14.

[30] See *istilahāt al-dabt*, Egyptian Mushāf, Appendix and Al-Dānī, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-143.

[31] See `Abd al-Rahmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Funūn al-afnān fī `Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Baghdad, 1988, pp. 104-106.

[32] He still has followers now. See S. al-Sālih, *Mabāhith fī `Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, Beirut, 19??, pp. 276-7.

[33] *The Muqaddima*, Dār al-Sha`b, Cairo, n.d.; pp. 377-8.

[34] Hifni Nāṣifī: *Al-Muqataṭaf*, vol. 83, Cairo, 1933, p. 206.

[35] See S. al-Sālih, *ibid.*, pp. 287-9; L. al-Sa`īd, *Al-Jam` al-ṣauti li'l-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, Cairo,

196?, pp. 291-2.

[36] al-Sa`īd, *ibid.*, p. 292.

[37] Wālī, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[38] See Wālī, *op. cit.* pp. 147, 157-8 and *passim*.

[39] See L. al-Sa`īd, *ibid*, pp. 297-300.

[40] H. Nāṣifī, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

[41] al-Sa`īd, *ibid*, pp. 304-6.

[42] Wālī, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

[43] See `Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-6.

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